

cheques, is signalling that it no longer gives priority to the maintenance of the Family Allowance Program to cover all families in Canada.

The Minister repeatedly denies this, but at the same time her application of this proposal enforces the point I just made. Last June 29, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) claimed that the June budget "fully protects the lowest income Canadians and the working poor". Only persons "who are not in need will be asked to share in the serious sacrifices which are required to bring our country out of the economic crisis". We agree with the National Council of Welfare which indicated that the social policy aspects of the June budget would adversely affect thousands of low income Canadians.

Family Allowances until now have been fully indexed, but the budget first, and now as expressed in Bill C-132, will limit indexation to 6 per cent in 1983 and to 5 per cent in 1984. If there had been no budget and no Bill C-132, Family Allowances would have been \$358.44 per child in 1983. However, with the budget cutback it will now amount to only \$342.24 per year. This reduction means a great deal to many families with children, including middle-income families. Let us not kid ourselves; it is not only low income families who are having trouble these days. Middle income families are suffering from the high cost of living, are being threatened with unemployment and are probably paying off mortgages at exorbitant interest rates. They are hit hard as well. If they have two or three children, of course it is difficult for them to manage.

The Minister stated that she chose to protect the Child Tax Credit which goes to low and middle income families by retaining full indexation to the cost of living. However, she failed to point out that the Child Tax Credit is an annual refund, whereas most families depend upon monthly Family Allowance cheques to cover the costs they face in purchasing clothes and school books and in putting food on the table for their children.

The \$26.91 per child is little enough as a Family Allowance to help with the costs of raising children each month. It does not even pay for the cost of a pair of jeans which most children need today, or the expensive runners which they also require. Of course, the price of these items will increase far above 6 per cent during next year. I know many families who do not seem to be known by the Minister that urgently need their Family allowance cheques, not at the end of the month but before the end of the month, to put food on the table. I know many mothers who simply do not have food to feed their families. Their welfare cheques are gone on rent and other costs, and they desperately await their Family Allowance cheques to put food on the table. I am sure there are many people who are working part-time or on unemployment insurance who have the same problem. The Minister does not seem to realize how important this is.

Also I should like to say that even higher income families use the Allowance as an essential part of their monthly income, often as an allowance for teenagers or for educational expenses. With unemployment reaching the highest level in our history, there are many families who normally would not

have relied on Family Allowance for basic survival but now really need it just to keep food on the table and clothe their children.

Children are a state responsibility; they are not only the responsibility of individual families. I refer back to the report of the National Agenda for Action in a book called "For Canada's Children", which was a result of a study by the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. It was put out by the Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child. I see the Hon. Member for Laval (Mr. Roy) has left the House. He chaired that Standing Committee. He will recall that the Committee committed itself, and it thought the Government, to some major steps. This is what it said about children:

Children should be a first priority, but in the structure of the Government of Canada there is no place where they are a primary concern.

The Minister has given several examples of this recently. It continued:

Children are the responsibility of all levels of Government we elect to represent us. Children are not independent economic entities; they depend on the family for their economic welfare. The normal working of the economy and the economic policies of Government therefore tend to affect the child indirectly through the family.

Also it said:

Since the quality of life of Canadian families is inextricably linked with the economic decisions made by governments, a concerted effort should be made to ensure that the economic decision making process takes into account the well-being of the family and the child.

Unfortunately, the Government has ignored this sound advice from the Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child. It has ignored it by not establishing a secretariat for children which the Commission recommended that could have certainly taken a stand on the matter before us today. Also the Government ignored the Commission Report in the development of its program of restraint and, in particular, in drafting the Bill before us.

The Family Allowance cheque traditionally recognizes the importance of children and families in Canada. It is the only means by which pay cheques and Unemployment Insurance cheques are topped up to allow for the cost of feeding and clothing children each month. Under our system a single person receives the same pay cheque as a married man or woman who has several mouths to feed. We have developed as a Canadian tradition, of which most of us are very proud, a way to adjust to additional size and responsibilities of families with the monthly Family Allowance cheque indexed to the increase in cost of living and with tax deductions for dependants.

Of course, the Family Allowance cheque is very important to all families, not only low income ones. Also I should like to say that the cheque is of particular significance to women, as I mentioned earlier. It is usually mothers who are the main parenting persons in the home. They are the persons who receive the Family Allowance cheque. For women who are full-time homemakers, often the Family Allowance cheque is the only one they receive in their own names. Perhaps many